WAGON-BOSS AND MULE-MECHANIC

Incidents of My Experience and Observation in the Late Civil War.

By R. M. PECK.

The towns we passed through on this route showed plainly already the devastating effects of the war; streets deserted; business houses all closed up, without an exception; many of the dwellings abandoned, with windows and doors broken out; not a white man, or even a good sized boy, to be seen; if any are remaining among the few families of women and children, they prudently go into hiding on the approach of armed men; now and then a few negroes are found remaining to look after their masters' families, while the men are off in the rebel army.

Some of these devoted old servants seem to think it their duty to stay and look after their master's interests, now that he is gone, and refuse to avail themselves of the opportunity to assert their freedom; but the great majority of them are prompt to light out to Kansas and freedom as soon as they find the way open. Many of the rebels, however, have taken their slaves, and as much of their stock and other property as they can move, further south to keep them out of the reach of the "—— Yankees."

The farms also show the ravages of war; fences thrown down or destroyed—mostly burned for firewood by passing bodies of troops of one army or the other; fields and orchards grown up in weeds; live-stock nearly all gone, especially mules and horses; little or no crops have been raised during the past season, and less will be produced the next. The country being overrun first by rebels and then Federals, what one doesn't take or destroy the other does; between the two armies this border country seems destined to become a desert waste.

After I left the Indian Brigade at Flat Rock Creek last Fall, taking George Anderson's train back to Fort Scott, Gen. Weir, being unable to drive the rebels out of Fort Gibson, had moved eastward into Missouri and Arkansas, to find forage and subsistence for his command, and joining Gen. Blunt's army had seen and participated in some lively fighting at Cane Hill, Prairie Grove, Shirley's Ford, and a few lesser fights; and after driving the rebel army of Gen. Hindman south to Fort Smith, the Indian Brigade, with some white troops, had been left at Elm Springs, Ark., to Winter.

Early in the Spring ('63)—just a few weeks before our present trip—this command (Indian Brigade) had moved toward Fort Gibson again, from Maysville, Ark., which place the rebels, under Cooper and Stan Waitie, evacuated as our men advanced, falling back across the Arkansas River, where they established a camp called Fort Davis.

It was in the fight near the site of old Fort Wayne, near Maysville, Ark., Oct. 22, '62, that Capt. Henry Hopkins's company of the 2d Kans. Cav. had made a gallant charge on a rebel battery, and captured the guns, but the enemy had got away with the caissons. The outfit we were now taking to Fort Gibson was intended to complete the battery for Hopkins.

In the vicinity of the Fort Wayne fight, as we passed along the road, we saw plenty of signs of the battle of six months previous; such as dead horses and mules, brokendown wagons, pieces of tents and tent poles, camp kettles, broken muskets and old bayonets, belts and cartridge boxes, etc. And such rubbish was strung along the road for several miles beyond the battle ground, showing that the enemy had left there in a hurry and somewhat demoralized.

AN INDIAN CAPITAL.

Tahlequah, the capital of the Cherokee Nation, 18 miles east of Fort Gibson, was a small village, containing, for an Indian town, some very respectable brick houses; and although now deserted, except for a few families of women and children, it looked as though in its prosperous times of peace it might have contained a population of 200 people. Two miles west of the town, on the road to Fort Gibson, we passed a large brick building which, before the war, was their Male Seminary. Three miles south of the Male Seminary is another little hamlet called Park Hill, near which is the Female Seminary, a building similar to the other. The wealthy people finish up the education of their young men and young ladies by sending them to some of our Eastern institutions of learning.

The Cherokees are well advanced in civilization, and many of them are well educated—even refined. They have a written and printed language; a printing office in Tahlequah, and before the war published a paper in Cherokee and English. Some of the mixed bloods show so little of the Indian, that I was surprised to find blue-eyed, flaxed-haired, light-complexioned people here, called Cherokee Indians.

They do not seem to flock together and dwell in towns as much as one would naturally expect from their aborignal habit of living in villages; but are scattered out through the Nation, engaged in farming and stock raising—principally the latter. Many of the mixed-bloods were wealthy, before the war began, owning large numbers of slaves, horses, cattle and other stock, and living in comfortable and commodious houses, nicely furnished, and with many modern conveniences.

In some of their houses I saw pianos, fine mirrors, fine furniture, paintings, fine carpets, and many other nice things that one would not expect to find among Indians: and in their barns I saw some fine carriages and harness, but the most of their good horses and mules had disappeared. The country was yet full of other stock, however, on our advent, such as cattle, hogs, sheep and poultry.

I was surprised at the scarcity of towns in so extensive a settled country; for, besides Tahlequah and Park Hill, Fort Gibson is the only other town I remember to have found in the Cherokee Nation—and I have since been over most of it. Fort Gibson seems to be the trade center. Outside of these places there were a few country stores scattered through the settlements.

At Fort Gibson we found the Indian Brigade was getting itself pretty comfortably established on the site of the camp recently vacated by the rebels. The principal buildings are taken for Commissary and Quartermaster's stores, hospitals, officers' quarters, and other public purposes. The place is built in the style of a military post, which it was until abandoned by Uncle Sam a few years before the war. It is located on the south or left bank of Grand River, two miles from its mouth, at the Arkansas. On the opposite bank of the Arkansas River the rebel pickets are stationed.

Next day after our arrival we turned over our battery outfit to Capt. Hopkins's company, the train unloaded its cargo, and with its escort started back by the same route to Fort Scott; Jeff Anthony and crew of battery drivers going with it, except myself. I got my time from Jeff for my services on the trip, and moved my blankets and "Saratoga" to the camp of the 2d Indian train, where I took a six-mule team to drive temporarily.

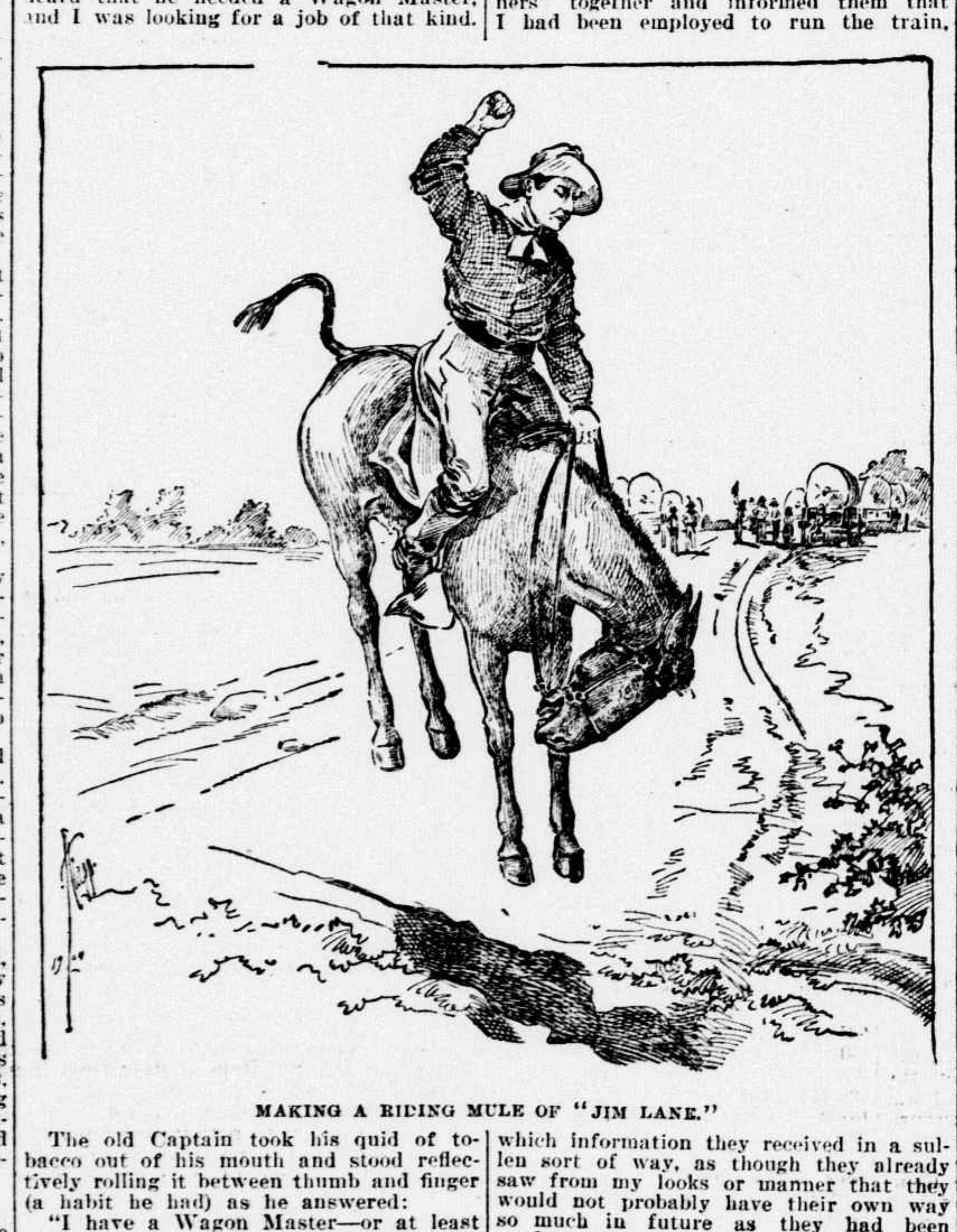
AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE.

Here in the 2d Indian train I again met my old acquaintance, Pat Hagan, the gambler, whom I and some comrades had brought away from Fort Union, N. M., in the Winter of '59-'60, to save him from being hanged by a Mexican mob, and whom we had again met at Lost Springs, Kans., in November, '61, operating with a gang of "Jayhawkers;" all of which I have mentioned in my narration entitled "Rough Riding on the Plains." Pat was now driving an ambulance connected with the train of the 2d Indian regiment, and incidentally playing a little poker when he found an opportunity to "skin" some man.

As the regimental train already had a competent and satisfactory Wagon Boss and Assistant, Bill Richmond and Hugh Poland, I opposed Col. "Shorty's" offer to "fire" one of them in order to give me the place, and told him I would prefer to wait for an opening elsewhere. In the train of the 1st Indian regiment, camped close by us, I found a number of my old teamsters still with the outfit that I had transferred to the Indian Brigade at Humboldt, Kans. Abe Merrill, my former lead "skinner," is now Wagon Boss of that train.

I kept my eyes and ears open inquiring for a prospective opening for a Wagon Master, and after some time heard that Capt. Chester Thomas, the Brigade Quartermaster, was in need of one. I asked Col. "Shorty" to go up to Capt. Thomas's office and introduce me, which he cheerfully did, recommending me in the highest terms as "a first-class and thoroughly competent Wagon Master."

I told Capt. Thomas (who, by the way, was an old man, a Kansas politician, and quite an eccentric character) that I had heard that he needed a Wagon Master, and I was looking for a job of that kind.



MAKING A RIDING MULE OF "JIM LANE."

The old Captain took his quid of tobacco out of his mouth and stood reflectively rolling it between thumb and finger (a habit he had) as he answered:

"I have a Wagon Master—or at least a man drawing the salary—but he ain't worth a ——, and never will be, in that capacity. He's a son-in-law of mine; a good-enough fellow—that is, a good farmer or something of that sort—but he's out of his element in this teaming business, and has just fairly run my train into the ground. Yes, on the whole, I guess I may safely say I need a Wagon Master, and need one bad." And looking me over, he added: "You couldn't have brought a better endorser. Although 'Shorty' has only been with us a short time, he is fast proving himself a first-class officer—one of them old Reguiars, you know, that knows everything about military service—and what 'Shorty' says goes. I think you would suit me, but maybe the job won't suit you. It's a hard-looking outfit now. Maybe, after you see it you won't want to have anything to do with it. Come, go up to the corral with me, and I'll show you the lay-out, and then if you think you can reconstruct the rawhide outfit you can have the job."

"But, Captain," I interposed, "I don't want to rob your son-in-law of his position."

"O, he be blanked," exclaimed the old man. "He's no earthly account there. The longer he stays with it the worse the outfit gets, and he's got to get out when I can find a man who can run that train. He's just letting the teamsters run the whole shebang and him too. I'll find him some sort of a soft job about my office. He'll be glad to give up that train. It's a devil of an outfit; and them teamsters—they're pizen. Have you got a good six-shooter?"

I told him I had.

"Have you got the nerve to shoot some of them infernal rascals if they undertake to run over you?"

I told him that I had been used to commanding such fellows, and thought if he would give me good backing I could manage them.

"You bet I'll stand by you," replied the old man, "and give you all the help you want if you'll only just fetch 'em to time, and make 'em do their duty—show 'em that you're going to be Boss. But you'll have trouble with 'em. They're a hard lot, Injins, niggers and no-account white men. You see, we can't discharge a man very often here, because we can't find one to take his place. You'll just have to keep 'em and punish 'em like they do soldiers, when they don't do what you tell 'em. I'll give you the whole force of the provost guard, if it's necessary, to enforce your orders. Lindley (that's my son-in-law) is afraid of 'em, and he just lets 'em run the shebang."

A SORRY-LOOKING OUTFIT.

When we reached the camp it made me feel almost sick of my bargain, to see what a ragged, rawhide outfit it really was. The wagons were scattered about in the utmost disorder, as if each skinner had located his wagon to suit himself, which was really the case—some of them facing one way, some another, no semblance of any alignment or parking. Some had bows and sheets, some had none; harness scattered here and there on the ground; most of it had been thrown down just where it was stripped off the mules as they stood in team at stopping, without the traces being unhooked from the single-trees; mules—a hard-looking lot of half-starved things—tied here and there, some to the wagons, some to trees, some staked out on bare ground. The wagons nearly all needed repairing, harness ditto, and half the mules barefooted. Out of the 25 teams I don't think there were six in serviceable condition.

The teamsters—a motley-looking lot—instead of showing some deference to their Quartermaster as we passed among them, paid no more respect to Capt. Thomas, as he expressed it, "than if he was a common Justice of the Peace."

When he asked one of them, as we approached a group who were playing cards, "Where's Mr. Lindley?" He was answered with an indifferent "Don't know," as they went on with their game.

After looking the outfit over the old man asked me: "Well, what do you think of the lay-out?"

"Well, Captain," I answered in rather a discouraged tone, "its the hardest-looking outfit I ever struck; but if you will give me the necessary assistance I will tackle the job and try to rebuild mules, wagons and harness."

"You can rely on all the help within my command," he replied, "and if you will straighten out that bunch of rawhide mules and scraps of wagons and harness, and get 'em into some semblance of a train, I'll say you're the best Wagon Master I ever saw."

"Have you a blacksmith and wagon shop and a harness shop, and material for repairs."

"Yes."

"And will you give me an order on these shops for what work I want done?"

"I'll place the shops and workmen at your command."

"All right." Then I added, "I don't think, from the looks of things, that your Assistant Wagon Master can be a competent man. Will you provide him some other job, and allow me to select my Assistant?"

"Certainly. Pick your man and bring him on."

"Well, Captain, if you will notify Mr. Lindley of the change, and have him to give notice to the teamsters that I am to be their future Boss, I'll take charge in the morning, if it suits you."

"Its a whack!" exclaimed the old Captain, apparently glad to unload the outfit onto my shoulders.

Just then Mr. Lindley approached, and Capt. Thomas introduced me, and explained the arrangements we had made. Mr. Lindley seemed as glad as the old man to find some one to take the ugly job off his hands.

I found him a much better man than the Captain's disparaging remarks had led me to believe; but he seemed to have no conception of the management of a mule train, nor any desire to acquire the necessary knowledge and experience. It was entirely out of his line.

At my suggestion he called his "skinners" together and informed them that I had been employed to run the train, which information they received in a sullen sort of way, as though they already saw from my looks or manner that they would not probably have their own way so much in future as they had been used to.

"Mr. Lindley," I remarked in hearing of all, "I have made arrangements with the Captain, here, to bring my own Assistant Wagon Master with me. I will be sorry to throw your Assistant out of a job, but the Captain has promised to provide him other employment, so that he will not suffer by the change. I will be here in the morning after breakfast to take charge."

As we walked back to the Quartermaster's office, Lindley remarked,

"I don't want to discourage you, Mr. Peck, but I think I ought to warn you that you have assumed the command of a tough lot of men. Several of those fellows have the name of being desperate men and man-killers. You may be used to such fellows, and know how to manage them; but for my part I must confess there are several men in that outfit that I have been afraid to offend. There's old Isaac Marshall, and his big son, Louie, and Steve Foreman and John Smith—each of whom are said to have killed a man or two, and I didn't want to be the next victim for either of them."

"There's just where you made your mistake, Mr. Lindley," I suggested. "You allowed those fellows to find out that you—would rather not have any trouble with them, and they were going to keep you in that way of thinking."

"That is," interjected Capt. Thomas, with more bluntness than I had used, "they soon found out that Lindley was afraid of them, and by bluster they have scared him into letting them have their own way in everything."

"It is in my line of business to control such fellows," I continued, without openly indorsing the Captain's plain way of putting it. "We frequently find such men among mule-skinners, and although I'm not much of a killer, I'm a pretty good bluffer, and in such affairs I find that a stiff bluff is all that is necessary. I make them believe at the start that I am going to be master, and I never let them lose sight of that idea. I keep them at a distance, and in their places, allowing no familiarities, for you know 'familiarity breeds contempt' the world over. I show them that I am thoroughly posted in my duties and theirs, and require them to perform their work well and promptly. I carry a good pistol and know how to use it when necessary, but it is more for ornament than use—just to be fashionable, you know—just to put me on an equal footing with other men who carry them. When I'm among people who don't carry arms I don't want a gun; but when I'm among men who go armed I find it's a good plan to be in the fashion. And among these rough fellows the fact of a man's having a good revolver hung to him will often save him from being imposed upon."

"Your head's level!" exclaimed the Captain. "You've got that subject down fine. I believe you'll know how to handle those fellows; but if you find it necessary to make an example of some fellow, and kill him, don't hesitate to do it. You shall have no trouble about it. Or if you want to put one in the guard-house occasionally, or administer military punishment of any kind, I'll arrange to have the guard instructed and ready to take care of them for you."

"All right, Captain, but I don't anticipate any serious trouble." And then we parted.

A WAGON BOSS AGAIN.

On going back to take charge of the train in the morning, Lindley was there ready to render me any assistance, or give any information in his power. I had brought one of my old teamsters, Simpson, as my Assistant. I found that the skinners were all messing together instead of being divided into convenient small messes; and they had also appropriated the Wagon Boss's tent, as Lindley had allowed them to do—he having been messing and staying with Capt. Thomas.

I told the men, what many of them already knew, that the tent was for the Boss, and the teamster's place was with his wagon; and directed them to gather up their stuff and go to their places. I also informed them that as soon as ration day came around again I should divide them up into proper messes of five to six men, in regulation style, and also would organize my own mess.

I had given the men orders to pick up their harness off the ground where they had dropped it, and hang it on their hind wheels—wheel harness first, swings' next—and leaders' on top—and to put their collars and bridles under the wagons. While some of them were complying with this order, one big mulatto fellow, Louie Marshall, stepped up and began to inform me that

"Lindley allows us to"——

I shut him up instantly with

"That'll do, sir! When you speak of your Wagon Master put Mister before his name. I don't care to know what Mr. Lindley did or didn't. I'm running this outfit now, and I think I understand my business. I don't want any of your advice or suggestions. You do just what I tell you to do, and do it promptly, and you'll have no trouble." And I gave him a look that must have convinced him that he had better obey my orders without trying to argue the question, for after looking at me a moment he mumbled out some apology for speaking, and moved off with alacrity and hung up his harness as directed. And this was one of Lindley's desperadoes.

Thereafter, whenever opportunities occurred, I took particular pains to give my orders to these bullies—these dangerous men of whom Lindley had warned me to beware—in a very decisive manner, and also to require their prompt obedience. I gave them to understand that they would be allowed no special privileges, as heretofore, nor shown any favors above the other men—that all must obey orders alike, and do their duty promptly. I knew that if these worst ones were brought to proper discipline I would have no trouble with the others, and therefore devoted my special attention to them. They soon seemed to arrive at the conclusion that I was going to be master there, and would put up with no foolishness; and although for a while they were a little sullen, they gave me more prompt obedience than I had expected.

As may be imagined, I was kept very busy for some time reconstructing that rawhide outfit; but I kept the teamsters and workmen at the shops busy. The foremen of the blacksmith, wagon and harness shops were a little sulky at first about doing all the work I was taking to them, for they, too, had been doing about as they pleased previously; but when they found that Capt. Thomas was backing me, and were told that if they didn't do my work promptly he would get other men who would, they came to time nicely.

As the young Spring grass was now getting a pretty good growth, I had the mules that were not needed for work kept out on herd every day from daylight till dark, instead of having them tied up to the wagons most of the time, as had been the rule; and the poor beasts soon began to show a great improvement in flesh on their bones and new coats of hair.

Most of the skinners seemed to soon take up with the new order of things, and evinced considerable interest in the reconstruction of the train, which I was carrying on; but, still, some of them seemed desirous of trying me now and then in some new way. Among other things they appeared to want to find out whether I could use the fine ivory-handled navy that I carried on my belt, or if it was just for ornamental purposes I carried it. In those days I kept myself in good practice, and could shoot pretty well at short distances of from 20 to 30 steps.

AN EXHIBITION OF MARKMANSHIP.

I had bought a turkey from a woman who came around selling poultry, and kept it staked out near my tent, tied by the leg, feeding it up for a future dinner. One day a skinner came rushing into the tent to tell me that my turkey had got loose. Going out I found the bird walking off through the weeds, and from the looks and actions of the teamsters who had gathered around, I felt sure that some of them had turned it loose for devilment. I knew the turkey would be difficult to catch, and concluded that I would just shoot it as the surest way. When some of the boys offered to run it down for me, I suspected that that was a ruse to run it off, and so told them to keep quiet, and I would stop the fowl.

Taking out my pistol, I walked quickly up to good shooting distance, and as I could only see the head and neck bobbing through the weeds as it walked, I thought it would be too difficult to hit the head, and therefore made a careful estimate of about where the body was, and fired, aiming to hit the larger part.

The turkey dropped, and I supposed that I had hit it where I aimed to, in the body. I told one of the negro boys to pick it up and take it to my cook, and returning my pistol walked back to my tent. When the bird was picked up I heard a shout from the fellow whom I had sent for it, and on asking what was the matter, he answered.

"Why, Boss, you done shot its head clean off!"

"Of course," I answered, as though it was just what I had intended. "Where did you suppose I was going to hit it?"

They expressed great astonishment and admiration of my marksmanship, as they passed the turkey around for inspection, and appeared to jump at the conclusion that in their new Boss they had found a crack pistol shot and that this was but an ordinary exhibition of his skill. I wisely concluded to rest on the fame that this chance shot had given me as an expert, and to give no further exhibition of my dexterity.

I heard one of the skinners remark in earnest admonition to his comrades as he joined the crowd who had been looking on from a distance,

"Fellers, don't you fool with him; don't you fool with him! He's a bad one! Jest took out his pistol, cool as you please, an stuck it out without hardly lookin' at the turkey, an' turned loose an' shot its head off clean as if you'd cut it off with a knife. Bet you he kin put them bullets jest where he wants to every time. I tell you, don't you pester him."

This seemed to satisfy them as to my ability to handle a pistol, and as I prudently avoided giving any further test my reputation rested on that accident. I often, however, in practicing, in those days, could put five out of six balls inside the size of a playing card at 20 steps (and this was about the only use I made of cards); but in this instance the hitting of the turkey's head had been purely accidental.

ROUGH RIDING WITH A MULE.

In those days I was also an expert "rough rider," and if any one could bring me a wild horse or mule that was difficult to ride, I would accept it as a favor, and take great delight in saddling and riding it. It seems strange to me now that I, or any one having common sense, could be so foolish as to risk neck or limb-breaking for fun, and I would not be guilty of such folly now for big money. But in the days of my youth and foolishness I used to believe and declare that there never was a horse or mule that I couldn't ride.

I found the riding-mule that Lindley had turned over to me was a very inferior beast, and so began looking through the teams to select another. The mules were all so worn and starved out and poor, that it was a hard matter to find one with life enough to suit me. The Quartermaster had been receiving a few contraband or captured mules, but these also were rather scrawny; as usual, somebody else had got away with the good ones, and only the scrubs were turned in to Uncle Sam.

There was one fine-looking mule, however, among the contrabands that had been turned in to Capt. Thomas, and on expressing my surprise that such an animal had not been gobbled up before it reached the Quartermaster's hands, I was told that the probable reason was the mule was found to be such a vicious devil that no one could handle him. He had been Christened "Jim Lane," after our Kansas Senator, as Capt. Thomas explained, "because he was so tricky."

I decided to try "Jim Lane" for a riding-mule, and on ordering one of the teamsters to lead him down to my tent and tie him to the wheel of my mess wagon, so that I could saddle him up and ride him, I was amused at the surprise and consternation manifested among the skinners at the idea of my riding "Jim Lane." There were a number of good riders among them, but none, it seemed, had cared to tackle this "wicked devil," as they called him. I knew that my riding that mule would convince them that I possessed still another enviable accomplishment, in the eyes of the average skinner—another confirmation of my abilities as a Wagon Boss.

Some of the teamsters tried to dissuade me from the undertaking, declaring that I would certainly get hurt, and may be killed. Whether they really thought so, or were only trying to scare me out of the notion, it only made me more determined to show them that I could ride that mule.

I had an excellent saddle—a Mexican tree—and had tested its adaptability and strength in many a tussle with wild mules and bronchos. After "bucking" Jim Lane to the side of the wagon, a process familiar to mule whackers, and making ready to saddle him, old Isaac Marshall, an old darky with a bad record—one of the so-called bad men of the train—came up to add his discouragement to those already volunteered by the group of skinners who stood around.

"What, boys!" he exclaimed in apparent astonishment, directing his remarks to the bystanders. "He shorely ain't a-gwyin' ter try ter ride that fightin' devil? Did you tell him what a bad mule he is?"

"Yes, we done tol' him," one fellow answered, "but don't make a bit o' differ'nce. He won't lis'en to us."

After a pause, as I seemed to pay no attention to these remarks, old Isaac ventured to advise me:

"Say, Boss, is you got any family? Kase if you is, you'd better leave word with Mr. Simpson, or somebody, where to write to 'em, to let 'em know what 'come of you."

Without making any reply to such "joshing" I went on saddling the mule, and with Simpson's assistance soon had him bridled and cinched up in good shape.

In riding a wild animal I always used a good, strong crupper to my saddle. This is especially useful on a mule, as they are so low in front that without a crupper to hold the saddle back to its place, they will often "buck" it onto their withers, and thus easily throw the rider over their heads.

After getting him saddled, I released the "Honorable Jim" from the wagon wheel, and let him play around at the end of the lariat until he seemed satisfied that he couldn't buck the saddle off, and then drew him up to me gently, got two men to hold him by the bit, one on each side; coiled up the lariat and tied it to the horn of the saddle, unbuckled my belt and handed my pistol to Simpson, mounted, and gave the word, "Turn him loose!"

And such a circus as I had then in the next few minutes? That mule tried all the tactics he was master of—bucking, kicking, trying to reach my legs with his teeth, kicking at my feet, and finally crowding up to a wagon and trying to rake me off.

At this stage of the game I put the spurs to him, and let him out down the road toward Tahlequah, and kept him going pretty lively for several miles. When he seemed somewhat subdued, and willing to behave like I thought a Senator's namesake should, I turned him around and rode back to camp. He was tired enough to be very docile just then, but not yet entirely subdued, and I had a similar circus with him every day for some time before I could say that he was "broke."

During the time that I had been with the 2d Indian train, before I had got the job of running Capt. Thomas's train, I had amused myself by riding some wild contraband mules, to gentle them a little for Richmond, the Wagon Master of that outfit.

Shortly afterward Col. "Shorty" had occasion to send out a mounted scouting party of his Indians, and having no horses to mount them on, he ordered Richmond to bring him some mules that would do for his soldiers to ride. Richmond brought up, among the lot, some of the contrabands that I had ridden, and as they seemed rather skittish "Shorty" asked,

"Wagon Master, have these mules ever been ridden?"

"Yes, sir," said Richmond, "Peck used to ride 'em."

"O, thunder! that won't do!" exclaimed "Shorty." "Don't bring me mules that nobody but Peck has ridden. I know that Peck. He'd ride the devil if he could get a rope on him. Bring me mules that any one can ride."

(To be continued.)

The Fight at Fort Stevens.

EDITOR NATIONAL TRIBUNE: I see an account of the Fort Stevens affair in The National Tribune of July 14; but, as usual, the Veteran Reserve Corps is left out! Now, the Corps mentioned were not Home Guards. It was composed of men who had seen hard and active service at the front; men with arms and legs shot off; with eyes, ears and fingers shot away; men shot through the head and men shot in every conceivable shape. If it had not been for them the Sixth Corps would have found the city of Washington in ashes when they arrived, late in the afternoon of July 12, 1864. The 19th Veteran Reserves, of which I was a member, and the 22d Veteran Reserves, were in the barracks on Capitol Hill. We were turned out about daylight, July 12, and hurried out Seventh street. When some distance from the city the muzzle of a gun appeared just over a ridge in the road, and they let drive at us. The gun was not over 100 yards from us; the shell struck another ridge, about 25 yards in front of us, bounded to the right, and exploded. We filed to the left, and as we did so some infantry appeared where the cannon was and gave us a volley of musketry. I have often wondered why we were not ordered to charge that battery. I think we could and would have captured it. However, we went on, and were deployed as skirmishers and held the rebels in check until the Sixth Corps came. There was a continual rattle of musketry and roars of artillery all day. Several men in our company were killed or wounded. I was on the extreme left of the skirmish line. A hotter day I don't think was ever experienced on the face of this brown earth—for everything was scorched brown. I lay there, flat on my bread-basket, as plain as if I were in the middle of the road. When I would pull the stopper out of my canteen to drink, steam would puff into my face.

A squad of rebels on the hill among the bushes put in the most of the day in stepping out, two or three at a time, and firing at me; but the only thing that struck me was the sun. About 3 o'clock I was sunstruck and was carried to the rear; but I revived enough to witness the beautiful sight, about dusk, when the Sixth Corps arrived and cleaned the rebels up. I say beautiful sight. They were fighting down in a flat, among jack-oak bushes, and the flashes of muskets looked like lightning-bugs. We could see the course of the shell through the air. A two-story building was burning, and several brass bands were playing National airs.

I have seen three or four accounts of the battle of Fort Stevens since the war, but the Veteran Reserve Corps is always left out. I am sure they did their duty, and probably saved the Capital. If any of Co. E, 19th Veteran Reserve Corps, or Co. F, 3d Del., should see this I would be more than glad if they would write.—EDWIN FRENCH, Co. F, 3d Del., Co. E, 19th V. R. C.

GETTYSBURG PRISONERS.

Brutality and Inhumanity of the Rebels and Robbers Who Were Their Guards on the March and in Prison.

EDITOR NATIONAL TRIBUNE: The following is a correct statement of facts, from notes taken on the spot, by Orwin H. Balch, 147th N. Y., to which I was an eye-witness, and I vouch for the truth of every word.—CLAUS C. CLAUSSEN, Co. B, 82d Ill.

ANNAPOLIS, MD., Sept. 28, 1863.

On the afternoon of July 1 there were about 3,000 of the First and Eleventh Corps taken prisoners, mostly in the village. Comrade Balch says:

"I had been to work, until I was taken, in the hospitals, taking care of the wounded; was not allowed to take the parole there and left to take care of the wounded, as I always supposed was customary with all that were connected with the hospital, but was marched to the rear with the rest.

"They enlarged our numbers the second and third day to over 4,000. On the third day we had our choice to take the parole and be sent to Carlisle, Pa., and take the responsibility of what view our Government might take of it, or go to Richmond and be legally exchanged.

"The rebel officer also said he had understood that Gen. Halleck had issued an order that he would not accept any parole on the field; and if we were taken before we were lawfully exchanged, we would be shot or hanged, as sure as there was a God.

"The most of our officers advised us not to accept of any parole on the field, as there was a great chance for our being recaptured before we crossed the Potomac.

"About 1,500 took the parole there; the rest went to Richmond. We were all very hungry, for we had drawn no rations since we had been taken. This day, July 3, there was the hardest fighting. During the battle it was a continual roar of musketry and cannonading from morning until sometime after dark. We could see a change in the rebels' countenances towards night.

"July 5.—This morning we were put on a double-quick and marched in the direction of the Potomac. The whole of Lee's army seemed to be on a retreat. At sundown we commenced passing through a mountain pass in one of the ranges of the South Mountains. Here we could see our cavalry making a dash on one of their trains, but we were guarded too sharply—the guard consisting of one division of infantry, one battery and a squadron of cavalry—to prevent us making any resistance or attempt to escape. At 12 o'clock p. m. we arrived at a village called Spring Mountain, a small place. The roads were in an awful condition. Raining; no rations; men used up; no medicine for the sick or wounded.

"July 6.—A large number of officers and men agreed to take their parole. Maj. Fairfax commenced paroling all who wished, but at 9 a. m. Longstreet came to the house where the Major was engaged and stopped the business, saying that all would have to go to Richmond. This included the sick and wounded.

"We were now marched in the direction of Waynesboro, Pa. The guards were very strict over the prisoners, using the bayonet when they tried to get water or buy anything to eat. We arrived at Waynesboro at 9 p. m.; marched through the town; heard cannonading in our rear. Marched until 2 o'clock of morning of July 7. No rations. Great confusion among the rebels.

"July 7.—At 10 o'clock a. m. reached Hagerstown, Md. Passed A. P. Hill's, Ewell's (late Jackson's) and Longstreet's Corps. The men of Hill's Corps gave our men a few hardtack. Along the whole route, it seemed, all the barns and outhouses had been taken possession of by the rebels for their wounded.

"Passed through Hagerstown. Rebel guards used their bayonets on our men when getting water and trying to buy bread. The ladies of the town waved their handkerchiefs to us, and said: 'Cheer up, boys, we would give you bread, but the Chivalry of the South threaten to burn our houses if we do!' Encamped outside of town. Bread sent us by Union people was taken by the guards and distributed among their own men. Rations.

"July 8.—Marched to Williamsport, Md., on the Potomac River. No person in town allowed to give or sell us bread. There had been a cavalry fight between Hagerstown and the River. Our dead lay, stripped of their clothing, in the field. Rebel pontoon bridges destroyed on the Potomac. The country around filled with wounded. Citizens of the town said over 15,000 wounded rebels had been set across the river. Our men had to trade their blankets and even take their shoes off their feet, and give them to the guards for bread. A guard would charge $3 in greenbacks for a small loaf of bread.

"July 9.—Day occupied in crossing the Potomac in flatboats. River very high. Guards taking prisoners' money on pretense of buying something for them to eat, but never returning money or food. After crossing the river Imboden's Brigade took charge of the prisoners. Gen. Graham, with 125 officers and 4,000 men, were now under Imboden, to be taken to Staunton.

"July 10.—Finished crossing the Potomac and marched about two miles beyond Martinsburg. The most exciting scene on our march occurred while we were passing through the streets of this patriotic little village. I must say that the strongest sentiment was manifested in this place that I have been through during the time that I have been in the service. It seemed that about every man, woman and child came into the streets, loaded with bread to feed the starving prisoners; but they met with a strong resistance from every officer and guard. Yet, in spite of all they could do to prevent our getting any of it, it was thrown into the ranks by cuts and loaves. Bakers' bread and great loaves of home-made bread, biscuits, crackers, cakes of all kinds, would come into the ranks, thrown from windows, doors and every by-place. They came like hailstones. There were not many pieces that struck the ground; for there were about 4,000 with raised hands, each eager to catch the bread.

"One particular case I will relate, to show the feeling of the people of this little town. A man I took to be a baker came out of a small alley, his arms full of great cuts of bread, and rushed through the guards and scattered the bread through the ranks, then rushed back for more. The officers, a number of them, seeing that this was a dangerous man, rushed to this place to keep him from doing any more such horrible deeds as feeding starving men. They met him, his arms again full of bread, and with drawn swords they threatened his life, if he did not go back with the bread. He did not mind their threats or fear their swords, but rushed through their line and the line of guards and threw bread into our ranks. This was a true and brave man! I expected to see him shot down, but he was not while I was in sight of that place; but he was ordered under arrest, and went out of my sight with an officer and guards.

"This village is 12 miles from the Potomac, at Williamsport, on the edge of West Virginia. The rebels were as much disappointed as we were elated at the strong Union sentiment that was manifested in the place. I was talking with one of the rebel officers. I told him that I was surprised to see the Union feeling that was in that place. He said I was no more surprised than he was, and that if he could have his way it would be Martinsburg no longer. 'You don't mean to say that you would destroy the place?' said I. 'Yes,' said he, 'for as I passed through the place the other day I tried to get a meal and I could not find a mouthful in the place! They said they had been robbed of all they had by our army!' He added that to see the abundance that they had for us made him feel as though he would like to see every building laid in ashes. We encamped that night about two miles from this place.

"July 12.—Reached Winchester and were hurried through the town. Encamped. Received rations—half pint of flour. The country on our route was a perfect waste—nothing having been planted. We had now 92 miles to march to Staunton. The march was commenced on July 13 and ended July 18. On the route large droves of horses and cattle were passed. These had been stolen in Pennsylvania and Maryland. They were driven in the direction of Staunton. We fared no better as to rations, and as high as $5 in greenbacks was paid our guards for a small loaf of bread. The rebel officers said the men had undergone more hardships than any other prisoners taken since the war began. At Staunton the prisoners' gum blankets, shelter tents, and some private property was taken from them.

"July 19.—The first lot of prisoners left for Richmond, 136 miles by rail, at which place they arrived on the morning of July 20. The prisoners were marched to a tobacco warehouse opposite a prison. The prisoners told our men, through their grated windows, that since the battle of Gettysburg all deserters and other prisoners held there who would volunteer to go to the front, had been liberated.

BELLE ISLAND.

"On the afternoon of July 20, the prisoners who had arrived at Richmond were taken from the tobacco warehouse to Belle Island. Before they were taken they were searched, and everything of value, which could be found was taken from them.

"The rations at the Island consisted of half a loaf of bread, weighing a half pound, one ounce of fresh meat, and a pint of water called bean soup. This was all a man received for his rations for one day. On Aug. 20 the Lieutenant of the Island had 800 men paroled for the purpose of being sent to Annapolis, Md. Aug. 21, 721 were marched from the Island to Libby's Tobacco warehouse in Richmond, and the following morning took the cars for City Point.

"The following are the most important facts which occurred during our six week's sojourn there:

"Private Blass, 4th Regiment, Excelsior Brigade, took the oath of allegiance to the rebel government and shipped in their bogus navy.

"Sept. 16 a lot of prisoners arrived. They had been taken at Charleston, S. C. These men, before leaving for Richmond, had their good clothing taken from them and old rebel suits given in exchange. This was the way the rebel government equipped its men in our uniforms around Richmond.

"On the night of Aug. 12 a large party escaped, with a few of the guards, who belonged to the 42d N. C.

"At noon Aug. 14, private John Donnelly, 91st Pa., who had that morning come to the Island, was standing near the bank that incloses the prisoners; the guard told him to go further back, and as he was in the act of turning to comply the guard raised his gun and shot him down. This act was a cold-blooded murder. Donnelly lived in Philadelphia. The same ball that killed Donnelly struck Wm. Bayne, 82d Ohio. The ball entered the breast of Bayne. His wound was a painful one, but not dangerous. The guard was taken off his post for the day, but in two days he was back again, ready to shoot more unarmed Yankees.

"On the morning Aug. 19 John Mahoney, 12th Mass., was shot dead by the guards. He was hurrying to the sink, being sick, when he was fired on and killed.

"It was the custom to give each morning to every 100 men a little salt. Aug. 19 this was stopped, and the rebel Quartermaster gave the salt to a miserable prisoner to sell in camp at 25 cents for one small spoonful.

"A number of the prisoners went to work for the rebels, outside the prisoners' inclosure. Their pay was extra rations. This they would bring inside, among the half-starved and sell. The most notorious individual at this business was a Sergeant by the name of Gavitt, 1st N. Y. Art. This Gavitt, when a squad was to be sent away, would select those who could give him $5 or $10.

"There are still 3,200 men on the Island; some of these men are Tennesseans, taken as long ago as September, '61. Others have now been held over 18 months.

"A search was made among the men for money, in August, each man being examined separately. The result was that the Provost-Marshal of Richmond got a bucket full of greenbacks, watches, etc. No money was returned to the men on their departure.

"The nights were very cold, and the men had nothing to cover themselves with. I am not capable of discribing all the sufferings and scenes that I witnessed while on the Island.

"The Stars and Stripes looked good, flying over the Steamer New York, that brought us safely to this place. Those who were able to go to College Green Barracks were taken there; the sick to St. John's College Hospital. I was among the latter. Here we got well washed up, received good, clean clothes—the old ones were thrown away. We felt like a set of new men after we got cleaned up and got rid of our Belle Island graybacks. They were very numerous in Richmond. The prisoners who have arrived here within the last few days state that the suffering of the prisoners increases daily."

"Camp Lewis."

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PRAISE FROM GEN. MILES.

Gen. Nelson A. Miles has sent the following letter to Col. F. H. Buzzacott, of the Lewis Publishing Company:

"My Dear Colonel: I desire to express the pleasure I experienced yesterday in visiting the Lewis Camp near the World's Fair, under your control. You have exercised your usual energy and skill in the establishment of that large, commodious and beautiful camp. It is not only most comfortable, but picturesque, and from my personal inspection it appeared healthful, and every department perfect in design and management. I congratulate you on your success.

"Very truly yours,

(Signed) "NELSON A. MILES."

Note: Clipping from the Globe-Democrat, July 20, 1904.